



# Memorandum

U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

Subject: ACTION: Official Interpretation of MUTCD

Date: April 27, 2005

Regina S. McElroy  
Director, Office of Transportation  
Operations

From:

Reply to: HOTO-1  
Attn. of:

To:

Mr. John Rohlf  
Division Administrator (HDA-SD)  
Pierre, South Dakota

This is in reply to an April 18 email message from Ms. Sharon Johnson of your staff to Mr. Scott Wainwright of our staff, requesting an official interpretation of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Ms. Johnson requested an interpretation regarding the requirements to either remove or cover the traffic signal heads during non-operational periods at certain locations where the traffic control signals are only operated for 1 to 2 weeks each year during the Sturgis Annual Motorcycle Rally.

Specifically, Ms. Johnson asked whether such signals are considered temporary signals and thus subject to the requirements for removal of signal heads covered in Sections 4D.20 and 4B.02, or whether the 50 to 51 weeks of the year during which the signals are not operated are considered a "seasonal shutdown" and thus subject to text in Section 4D.01 allowing the signal heads to be covered rather than removed.

Section 4D.01 states, "When a traffic control signal is not in operation, such as before it is placed in service, during seasonal shutdowns, or when it is not desirable to operate the traffic control signal, the signal faces shall be covered, turned, or taken down to clearly indicate that the traffic control signal is not in operation."

This phrase "during seasonal shutdowns" in Section 4D.01 is intended to address a condition where a permanent traffic signal, warranted by "normal" traffic conditions present on an average day (as stated in Section 4C.01 regarding signal warrants) is turned off or otherwise made non-operational during a particular season when its operation is not justified. Most often, seasonal shutdown is used in some communities where tourist activities are a major factor in the local economy for most but not all of the year. In such communities, during most of the year vehicular and pedestrian volumes are sufficient to warrant the permanent signalization but there may be an annual period of a few weeks or months when tourist activity is much lower, to the point that signalized operation is not necessary and seasonal shutdown would reduce delays for



local residents. Seasonal shutdown might also be applied in cases where a permanent signal justified by traffic associated with a major traffic generator such as a large factory is shutdown for a period of a few weeks in the summer when the factory closes to allow all employees to take vacation at the same time.

A temporary traffic control signal is defined in Section 4D.20, which states, "A temporary traffic control signal shall be defined as a traffic control signal that is installed for a limited time period." The support information in Section 4D.20 indicates that temporary traffic control signals are for specific purposes and cites some examples, such as in temporary traffic control zones. However, there is no intention that the use of temporary traffic control signals be limited only to temporary traffic control zones (work zones, incidents, etc.). The decision by a jurisdiction on where and for what period of time to install a temporary traffic control signal is governed by the guidance in Section 4D.20 that states, "A temporary traffic control signal should be used only if engineering judgment indicates that installing the signal will improve the overall safety and/or operation of the location."

In consideration of these provisions of the MUTCD, it is our interpretation that traffic control signals installed for the purpose of providing safe and reasonable traffic control during only a short time period and not justified for operation during the remainder of the year, such as those operated just for the Sturgis Annual Motorcycle Rally, are properly considered temporary traffic control signals and subject to the provisions of Section 4D.20. That section recommends that temporary traffic control signals should not be operated for more than 30 days at a time, and mandates that if the time period between operations is more than 5 working days, the temporary traffic control signal shall be removed. In Section 4B.02, which covers signal removal, an option is provided to leave the poles and cables in place after removing the signal heads.

If you have any questions, please call Mr. Wainwright at 202-366-0857 or email him at [scott.wainwright@fhwa.dot.gov](mailto:scott.wainwright@fhwa.dot.gov). Please note that we have assigned your request the following official interpretation number and title: "4-288(1)- Temporary Signal versus Seasonal Shutdown." Please refer to this number in any future correspondence on this matter.